

Recuperating in a Winter Wonderland

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I always have been a big fan of snowboarding, and, with 11 years of experience, I consider myself proficient on the slopes. I just had been commissioned when I decided to spend winter break in Mammoth—my last opportunity to do so before reporting to flight school in Pensacola in March.

I arrived in Mammoth to find it hadn't snowed recently, and the conditions were comparable to a spring skiing trip. At night, however, the slush created by the heat of the day froze into layers of ice, setting the stage for hard landings.

On my third day at the resort, I felt I knew the terrain well enough to try some of the larger jumps. I was hitting one mogul particularly well—it would launch me about 10 feet into the air. After my eighth trip over this piece of terrain, I figured I probably should call it a day and go back to the lodge. Instead, though, I decided to jump one more time—just for the sake of pushing myself and proving I could handle this jump at full speed.

As I made my approach, I was thinking about my two previous jumps: I hadn't had enough speed and had landed a little short of where I wanted to be each time. I was determined this jump would be different. When I launched off the lip, I immediately realized I was tilting back and to my right. I figured when I came down, I could make some last-minute corrections to my body position to absorb the impact from being 10 feet in the air. It didn't take me long, however, to realize I was going to make a hard landing.

When I touched down, I used my right wrist to correct for being canted back and to my right. Once the rest of my board hit the icy landing, my knees came up and smacked into my rib cage. I ended up riding away from the landing, but I knew I might have broken



something because the wind was knocked out of me. I also had heard a “crack” as my knees hit my chest.

I rode to the nearest ski patrol and told him I had hurt myself. He checked my rib cage and said I had broken a rib. However, my real surprise came when I took off my glove. My fingers weren't moving, and I noticed my wrist was deformed: It was pointing downward at an angle. I immediately became queasy and went into shock. White stars were dancing all around my peripheral vision when I passed out.

An ambulance took me to the nearest hospital, where a doctor diagnosed a broken rib on my right side and a broken right distal radius. I ended up with a closed reduction on my wrist, which amounts to an orthopedic surgeon putting temporary pins in your wrist. The best part of this procedure is that the pins partly protrude from the skin, which creates a conversational piece.

I no longer have the pins, but I still have the lessons I learned from this fiasco. First, I knew in the back of my mind I shouldn't be trying these types of jumps when I was scheduled to report to flight school in three months. I also should have considered how a landing on ice could alter my bone structure, especially from a height of 10 feet. I had ignored both common sense and ORM. Finally, let me caution all readers to wait until you get out of the Navy to practice for the X-Games. ■